

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 10, 2021

Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, MSc, PhD
World Health Organization
Avenue Appia 20
1211 Geneva
Switzerland

Dear Director Tedros:

We write to request clarification regarding the current naming processes at the World Health Organization (WHO), and request a plan for a consistent naming policy going forward, particularly as we continue to see new variants in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since 2015, the WHO has opted to use names such as “SARS,” or the Severe Acute Respiratory Symptom Coronavirus 2, which denote the symptoms, manifestation of disease, and/or its severity or seasonality. We understand this new naming system was implemented to draw naming practices away from the use of locations, names, animals, food, or industries like “Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus” (MERS-CoV), or the “Swine Flu,” which were deemed to have damaging effects.¹

In May 2021, the WHO announced it would be using letters of the Greek alphabet to differentiate between key SARS-CoV-2 variants that cause COVID-19.²

However, we are disappointed and confused by several discrepancies in both of these policies. This month the WHO decided to skip over letters of the Greek alphabet, specifically “Xi” because it is a “common last name.” This is a clear double-standard and is politically motivated as the WHO declined to rename the “Norovirus” because of the common last name Noro in Japan and elsewhere.

We are also curious as to why earlier this year the “Yezo Virus” was named for its location of origin, the historical Japanese name for the island of Hokkaido. This virus is a variant of the Nairovirus, named after the “Nairobi Sheep Virus” and is also related to the “Congo-Crimean hemorrhagic fever.”³

In light of these two discrepancies, it seems the standard for naming viruses is arbitrarily based on names that are most beneficial to favored members of the WHO, particularly China. Indeed,

¹ <https://www.who.int/news/item/08-05-2015-who-issues-best-practices-for-naming-new-human-infectious-diseases>

² <https://www.who.int/news/item/31-05-2021-who-announces-simple-easy-to-say-labels-for-sars-cov-2-variants-of-interest-and-concern>

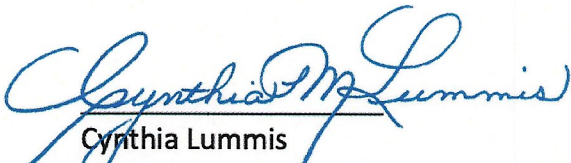
³ <https://www.newsweek.com/yezo-virus-new-disease-infects-humans-discovered-japan-ticks-hokkaido-1635580>

In light of these two discrepancies, it seems the standard for naming viruses is arbitrarily based on names that are most beneficial to favored members of the WHO, particularly China. Indeed, the arbitrary nature of the naming policy only further underlines concerns that the WHO kowtows to the Chinese Communist Party and Chinese General Secretary Xi Jinping that were brought to the surface after the WHO and China's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic began in Wuhan.

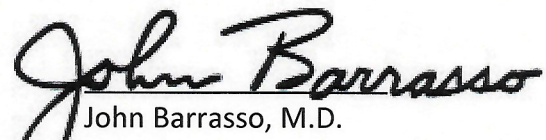
For too long, the WHO has bowed to pressure from the Chinese Communist Party. This only damages the credibility of health officials across the world and sows fear, confusion, and politics into public health.

We are interested to understand these naming discrepancies, and how the WHO plans to implement a consistent virus naming policy in the future. The lack of a uniform naming policy causes confusion from an organization that is supposed to provide consistency, clarity and non-political guidance to nations around the world.

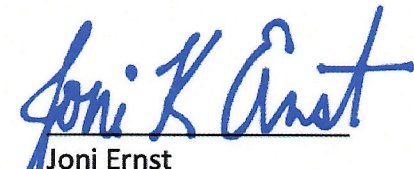
Sincerely,



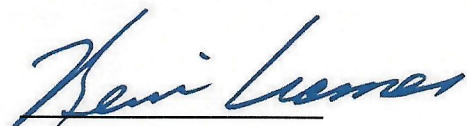
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